



Dragon School, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

November 2020

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Dragon School, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology were appointed by CPC Project Services LLP to conduct an archaeological evaluation at the Dragon School, Oxford. The evaluation comprised the excavation of three trenches within the footprint of a proposed new Music School, a link to Lynam Hall and associated landscaping.

The evaluation recorded three shallow gullies and terracing deposits for the current tarmacked sports area. Although no datable artefacts were recovered from the gullies, they possibly represent garden features to the rear of Lane House, which appears to have originally extended further to the north-east prior to the construction of the sports area.

The evaluation was carried out over the course of two days, on the 19th and 20th October 2020.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank CPC Project Services LLP for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Paul Murray, who was supported by Francesca Gordan. Survey and digitising was carried out by Marjaana Kohtamaki. Thanks, are also extended to the team of OA staff that processed the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by CPC Project Services LLP to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the Dragon School Oxford .
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 17/02419/FUL). Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with David Radford, Archaeologist at Oxford City Council, established the scope of work required; this document outlines how OA implemented those requirements.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in line with Chartered Institute for Archaeologists guidance (CIfA 2020).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The Dragon School lies at the end of Bardwell Road on the north side of Oxford, just over 1.75km from Oxford's historic core, and 340m east of the Banbury Road, the main northern route into the city (Fig. 1). The eastern school boundary runs along the River Cherwell with the other three sides bounded by the late 19th-century development of north Oxford. The site lies within the historic parish of St Giles.
- 1.2.2 The Dragon School is situated c. 2km west of the River Thames, which is separated from the River Cherwell by a gravel terrace. The college lies on the 2nd Summertown Radley gravel terrace of the River Cherwell (BGS 2020). The underlying geology is Oxford Clay.
- 1.2.3 The grounds of the Dragon School gently slope down towards the north, with the drive to Lane House lying at 61.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) at its southern end, Dragon Lane at 61.3m aOD, within the north-west corner of the site and Bardwell Road in the north at c. 60.9m aOD. The downwards slope from west to east towards the river is more pronounced, with a fall of c. 2m across the area of proposed development.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (OA 2017) and will not be fully reproduced here. The following summary provides a context for the proposed works.

Previous archaeological investigations

- 1.3.2 A total of eleven archaeological investigations have been undertaken within a radius of c. 750m around the site. These have predominantly been undertaken in locations west and south of the site, and comprise small evaluations and watching briefs.
- 1.3.3 Extensive investigations have been undertaken within north Oxford, particularly in the University Science Area on the south side of the University Parks c. 570m from the

area of proposed development, and at the former Radcliffe Infirmary site, c. 850 to its south-west.

Prehistoric period (500,000 BP – AD 43)

- 1.3.4 A number of finds of prehistoric flint artefacts have been made within the vicinity of the site. These includes a Palaeolithic axehead found 520m south of the site and an undated flint arrowhead 400m south-east of the site. Neolithic flint flakes and a late Neolithic scraper have been recovered from different locations in Bardwell Road, 400m to the north-west. A Neolithic henge monument was found in St John's Kendrew Quad, and an enclosure from a similar period was identified at the Radcliffe Infirmary site.
- 1.3.5 The density of archaeological evidence is greater for the late prehistoric period. A Bronze Age burial was found in Norham Road, 380m to the south-west of the site. Within 200m to the south of the site Bronze Age palaeochannels were uncovered in the University Parks. The Parks area also contain cropmarks of a number of ring ditches, some of which, from the limited excavation carried out, are dated to the Bronze Age. A number of ring ditches have been excavated at the Radcliffe Infirmary, in the Science Area, at the Sackler Library and in St Michael's Street. These excavations and the cropmarks suggest that there was a barrow cemetery extending across the area during the Bronze Age.
- 1.3.6 The cropmarks within the University Parks, also comprise enclosures and linear features. Excavations there and in the Science Area further south have found evidence of Iron Age occupation. Iron Age material has also been identified in Park Town, where numerous pits were excavated, c. 300m west of the site. A pit containing Iron Age pottery, animal bone and deer antlers was found in Crick Road, c. 280m to the south-west.
- 1.3.7 A recent Watching Brief carried out just to the south of the site revealed a former stream channel (palaeochannel) and an undated ditch and pit.
- 1.3.8 Generally archaeological investigations have shown that the gravel terraces were favoured locations for settlement, particularly farmsteads, throughout the Thames Valley during the prehistoric period. The presence of significant prehistoric ritual activity (such as the St John's college henge) and burial activity (such as the Bronze Age barrow cemetery) increases the potential of the area. This has led to it being designated as having high archaeological potential in the Archaeological Research Agendas prepared for Oxford City Council.

Romano-British period (AD 43 – 410)

- 1.3.9 Evidence of Roman occupation has been found at Wykeham House, c. 470m south-west of the site. Burials and pottery have been uncovered at Crick Road, c. 280m to the south-west. Further burials, a possible building, coins and pottery have been recovered at St Antony's College, c. 590m to the south-west. A large number of coins were found in Bevington Road, c. 600m south-west of the site, and stray finds of coins and pottery sherds have been made elsewhere in the vicinity. To the south excavations have uncovered the remains of Roman farm settlements, some showing continuity of use from the late Iron Age into the Roman period. It is likely that some of the cropmarks in the Parks represent features dating from this period.

- 1.3.10 There have been suggestions that a Roman road followed the line of the Banbury Road and that roadside settlement was more complex than that represented by simple farmsteads, although concrete evidence for has to be identified.
- 1.3.11 The level of Roman activity identified in this part of north Oxford has resulted in its inclusion within an area of high archaeological potential in the Archaeological Research Agenda prepared for Oxford City Council.

Early medieval period (AD 410 – 1065)

- 1.3.12 Evidence for activity during the early Saxon period has been found at a number of locations across Oxford. These include barrow burials, skeletons and artefacts from the area of the Radcliffe Infirmary c. 700m to the south-west of the site. The finds suggest a possible early medieval cemetery in the Infirmary area. Recent work at the site has also found evidence of occupation during this period, including a sunken-featured building. Little is known about this period in Oxford, but there may have been settlement on the gravel terrace upon which the edge of the area of proposed development lies.
- 1.3.13 An Anglo-Saxon burial with a knife was found in Norham Gardens, c. 310m south of the site, and a shield boss and spearhead were found in Park Town 180 m to the west. Residual Saxon pottery has been recovered at St Anne's College, c. 670m south- west of the site.
- 1.3.14 A defended burgh was laid out at Oxford from the 9th century onwards. After this a substantial town developed, but this did not extend as far north as the area of the present Dragon School. During that period the land probably belonged to the manor of Walton, with which it was associated until the 16th century. It is also probable that during the latter part of the early medieval period the area in the vicinity of the site was a mixture of arable land and meadow, as mapped in the northern part of St Giles parish during the later medieval and post medieval periods.

Later medieval period (1066 – 1550)

- 1.3.15 The site is located within St Giles parish which was established in the early 12th century. It was initially granted the tithes from the Walton family, suggesting that the land around it formed part of Walton manor, and the area was known as Walton fields in the 14th and 15th centuries. The site probably comprised open fields, a view supported by later maps and the presence of ridge and furrow in University Parks 350m to the south-east of the site. Two pits and a ditch, probably of medieval date, were excavated at Norham Road, c. 150m west of the site and some pottery and ridge and furrow were identified at St Anne's College, c. 670m to its south-west.
- 1.3.16 Most of St Giles parish was a mixture of arable fields and meadow, with common pasture rights recorded in the 14th century. Osney Abbey had extensive holdings in Walton Manor until 1541 when these were distributed following the dissolution of the monasteries.

Post-medieval period (1550-1900)

- 1.3.17 The land north of the medieval town of Oxford, including the site, was first recorded as St Giles Field in 1542. St John's College purchased much of it in 1573, but the land continued to be used for mixed farming. In 1642-4 during the Civil War, new defences were built on the north side of Oxford, c. 800m north of the site.
- 1.3.18 The earliest available historic map, from 1769, shows the area on the western side of the site as Broadmeadow Furlong, which was divided into several strip field holdings. The land immediately to its west, in what is now Park Town, was owned by New College.
- 1.3.19 By the 19th century, building had begun on the north side of Oxford, including the Radcliffe Infirmary and the Radcliffe Observatory. In the 1820s Beaumont Street was set out and the surrounding streets formed part of further residential development. Agricultural income was falling and in 1832 an Inclosure Act was granted, which would enable St John's College to release land for building when existing leases expired. In 1849 the New College land, west of the site, was acquired for a new workhouse. When the project was cancelled, the land was used for the construction of Park Town, a small garden suburb. The area comprising the site however remained as open land, and Norham Road and the Norham Manor Estate on its southern side had been laid out by this date.

Modern period

- 1.3.20 The Dragon School was founded in 1877. It initially operated from premises in St Giles and then Crick Road prior to moving to its current location at the end of the 19th century. The 1900 edition of the OS map is the first to show the school, then comprising the lodge and a single block alongside Dragon Lane. Bardwell Road ended at that point and Charlbury Road had not yet been constructed. The area of proposed development was shown as open land and the southern portion was a plant nursery.
- 1.3.21 The 1919 OS map of Oxford depicts the main block having been extended. Bardwell Road had also been extended and its continuation, Chadlington Road, and Charlbury Road and further streets to the north had been built. An additional school site had been developed on the north-east corner of Bardwell Road. Two houses had been constructed at the site close to Dragon Lane, the northern one called Lane House.
- 1.3.22 By 1938, some additional smaller buildings and a new block on the southern side of the Dragon School site had been constructed. The 1961 OS map is the first to show a clear association between the Dragon School and the fields towards the River Cherwell to the east. The area of proposed development had not changed. In the 1960s Lane House was acquired by the school. The western Dragon School building had been extended by 1977 and there were also changes to the blocks to the east, including the construction of a swimming pool. This layout remains the same on the 1992 OS map, but there have been significant changes since, with new buildings added and AstroTurf sports pitches laid.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive,
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains,
- iii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains,
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy,
- vi. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape,
- vii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive,
- viii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status utility and social activity, and
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were to determine or confirm the presence of remains related to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Roman period.

2.2.2 Any remains of significance will be related to the *Oxford City Archaeological research agendas* (2011) for the relevant periods, and *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment* (Hey & Hind 2014).

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The works comprised the excavation of 1 trench measuring 10m by 1.8m and two trenches measuring 15m by 1.8m, equating to a 4% sample of the 0.18ha site. The trenches were laid out within the footprints of the proposed buildings (Fig. 2). All works were undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2020) produced by Oxford Archaeology and approved by David Radford, Archaeologist for Oxford City Council.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The geology of the second Summertown Radley terrace gravel was recorded within all the trenches. In Trenches 1 and 2 the geology was overlain by two levelling layers of mid brown and dark grey-brown clay silt, which in turn were overlain by a tarmac surface. In Trench 3 the geology was overlain by an alluvial deposit which was in turn overlain by an earlier garden soil which was sealed by the current turf and topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in Trenches 1 and 2. No features were recorded in Trench 3.

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 The geological horizon, 106, was present at a depth of 0.9m below ground level (Bgl); at 58.85m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). A single ditch or gully, 104, was recorded cutting the geological horizon. This was aligned ENE-WSW, and measured 0.5m wide by 0.24m deep with sides angles at 45° and a flattish base. It was filled by a soft, mid grey-brown clay silt with occasional stones (105).

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 The geological horizon, 210, was present at a depth of 0.94m bgl (59.03m aOD). Two parallel ditches or gullies (205 and 206) both aligned ENE-WSW, were recorded cutting the geological horizon. Ditch/gully 205 was located towards the south-east end of the trench. It was 0.66m wide and 0.24m deep with sides angled at 45° and a gently rounded base. It was filled by a firm mid brown silty clay with occasional stones (204). Ditch/gully 206 was located 1.5m to the north-west of 204. This was 0.88m wide, 0.32m deep also with sides angled at 45° and a flattish base. It was filled by a firm, dark grey silt with occasional charcoal flecks and occasional stones (207). A small irregular feature at the north-western end of the trench, 208, was interpreted as an area of root disturbance.

3.6 Trench 3

3.6.1 The geological horizon, 303, was present at a depth of 0.8m bgl (59.75m aOD). Layer 303 was overlain by an alluvial deposit, 302, comprising a light pale grey-brown silt, 0.15m thick. The alluvial deposit was overlain by a soft, mid grey loam, 301, which

appeared to be an earlier garden soil, 0.24m thick, which in turn was overlain by the current turf and topsoil, 300, which was 0.22m thick.

3.7 Finds summary

3.7.1 No finds were recovered during the evaluation. The three linear features recorded in Trenches 1 and 2 were fully excavated in an attempt to recover datable artefacts.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The evaluation was carried out in dry, bright conditions and the geological horizon was clearly established.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 The three linear features recorded in Trenches 1 and 2 were all parallel, aligned ENE-WSW. They were also broadly similar in terms of their dimensions, profiles, and fills. Google Earth (historical imagery) was viewed and an aerial photo dated 1945, although somewhat unclear, appears to show the garden of Lane House continuing further to the north-east than its current extent. The garden backed onto the sports fields, occupying the tarmacked sports area where Trenches 1 and 2 were located. Trench 3 located within the garden of Lane House recorded an earlier garden soil. It is perhaps likely that the gullies represent garden allotment features.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench contained a single ditch or gully, aligned ENE-WSW . The feature was sealed by two levelling layers forming a terrace and a tarmac surface.					Length (m)	15
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	1
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.14	Tarmac surface	-	20 th C
101	Layer	-	0.16	Gravel make-up for 100	-	20 th C
102	Layer	-	0.3	Levelling layer. Tenacious dark grey silt, 2% charcoal. CBM and china noted.	-	20 th C
103	Layer	-	0.3	Levelling layer. Soft mid brown clay silt.	-	-
104	Cut	0.5	0.24	Ditch or Gully	-	-
105	Fill	0.5	0.24	Fill of 104. Soft, mid grey brown clay silt.	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench contained a two ditches or gullies, aligned ENE-WSW. The features were sealed by two levelling layers forming a terrace and a tarmac surface.					Length (m)	15
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	1
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.14	Tarmac	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.14	Gravel make-up for 200	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.4	Levelling layer. Tenacious dark grey silt, 2% charcoal. CBM and china noted.	-	-
203	Layer	-	0.4	Levelling layer. Soft mid brown clay silt.	-	-
204	Fill	0.66	0.24	Fill of 205. Firm, mid brown silty clay, occasional stones.	-	-
205	Cut	0.66	0.24	Ditch or gully. Aligned east-west.	-	-
206	Cut	0.88	0.22	Ditch or gully.	-	-
207	Fill	0.88	0.22	Fill of 206. Firm, mid-dark grey silty clay.	-	-
208	Cut	0.67	0.15	Possibly modern disturbance. Irregular sides and base.		
209	Fill	0.67	0.15	Fill of 209. Loose, mid brown sandy gravel.		

				Possibly root or modern disturbance.		
210	-	-	-	Mid brown sand gravel geology		

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil, subsoil and an alluvial layer overlying natural geology of sandy gravel.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.22	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil. Soft, mid brown loam.	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.15	Alluvium. Soft, pale grey brown silt.	-	-
303	-	-	-	Light brown sandy gravel. Geology	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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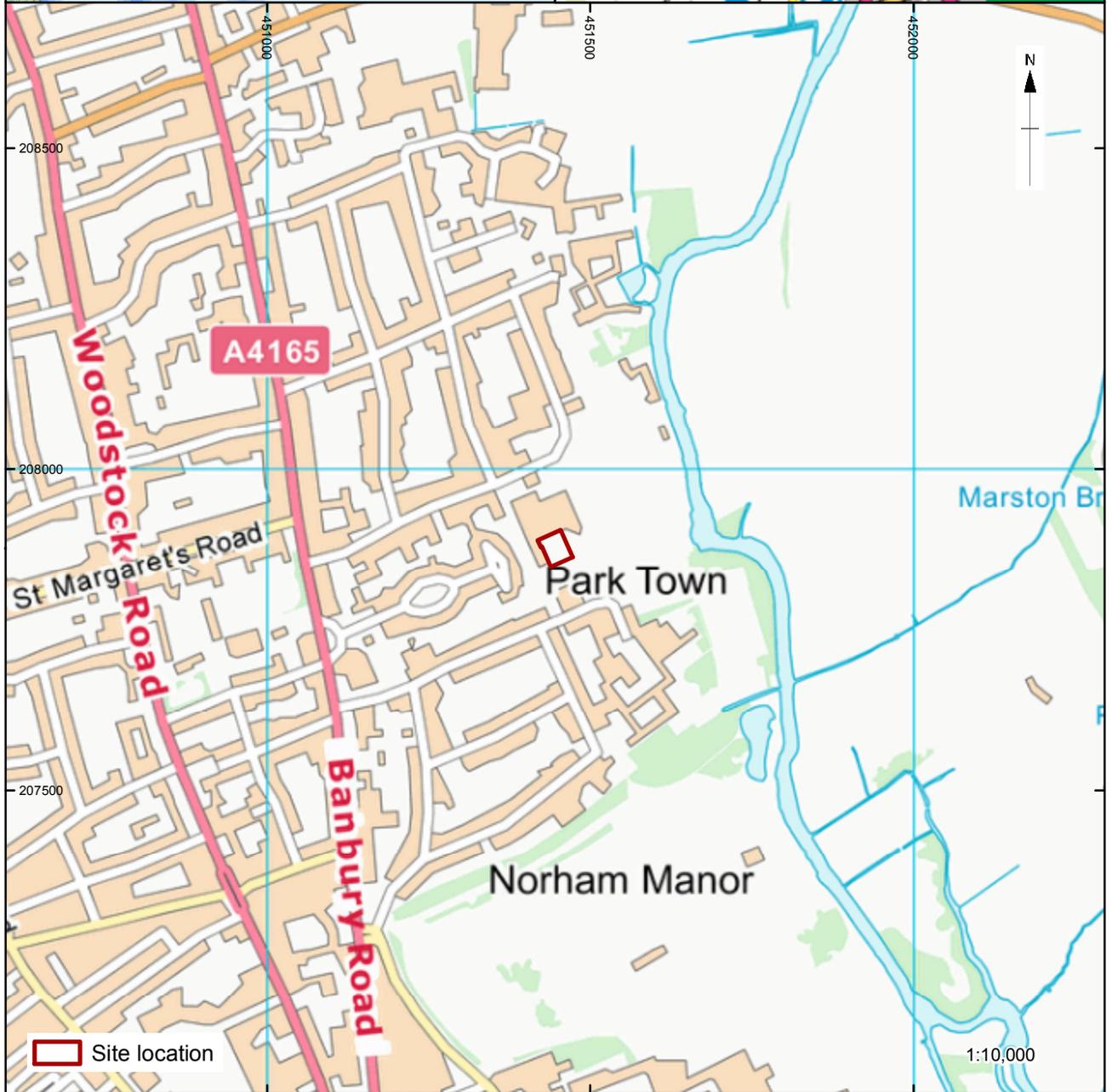
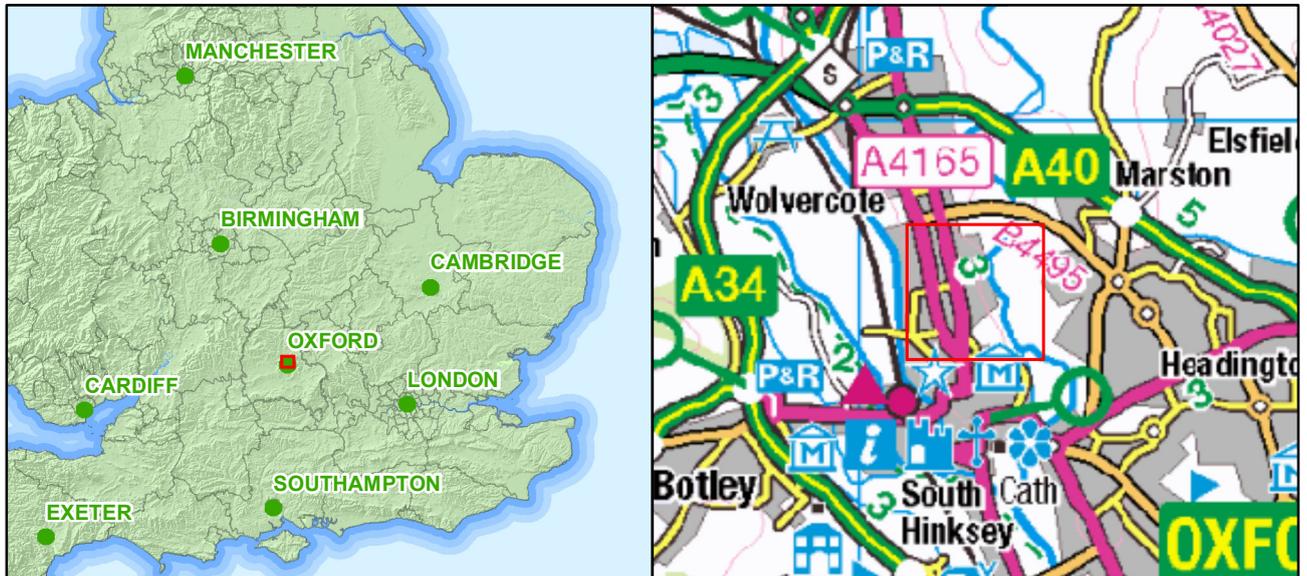
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APPENDIX C**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	The Dragon School
Site code:	OXDGON20
Grid Reference	SP 51448 07876
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	Two days. 19-20/10/2020
Area of Site	1760m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS : 2020.41
Summary of Results:	The evaluation recorded three shallow gullies and terracing deposits for the current tarmacked sports area. Although no datable artifacts were recovered from the gullies, they possibly represent garden features within the garden to Lane House, which appears to have originally extended further to the northeast prior to the construction of the sports area.



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Figure 1: Site location

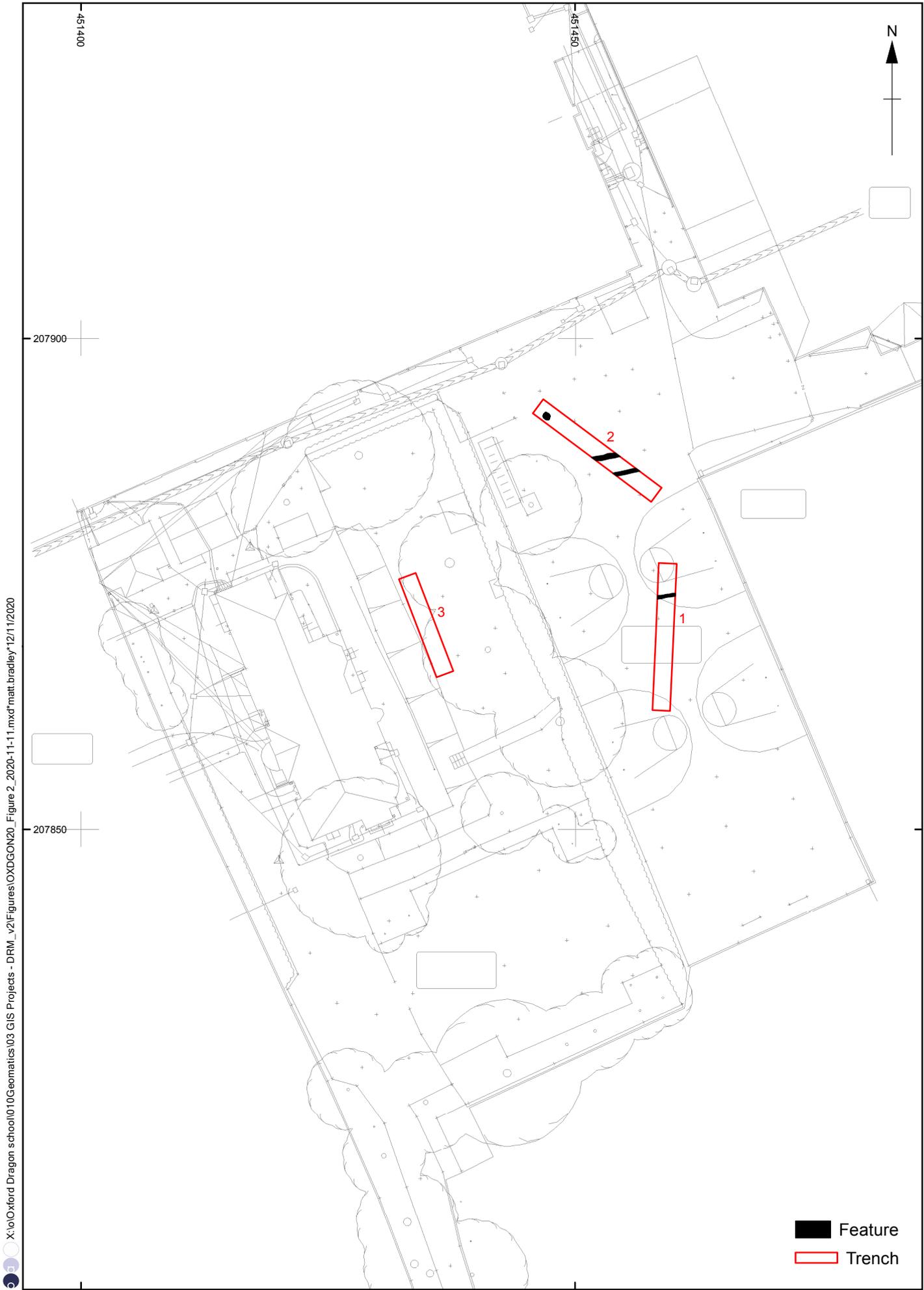
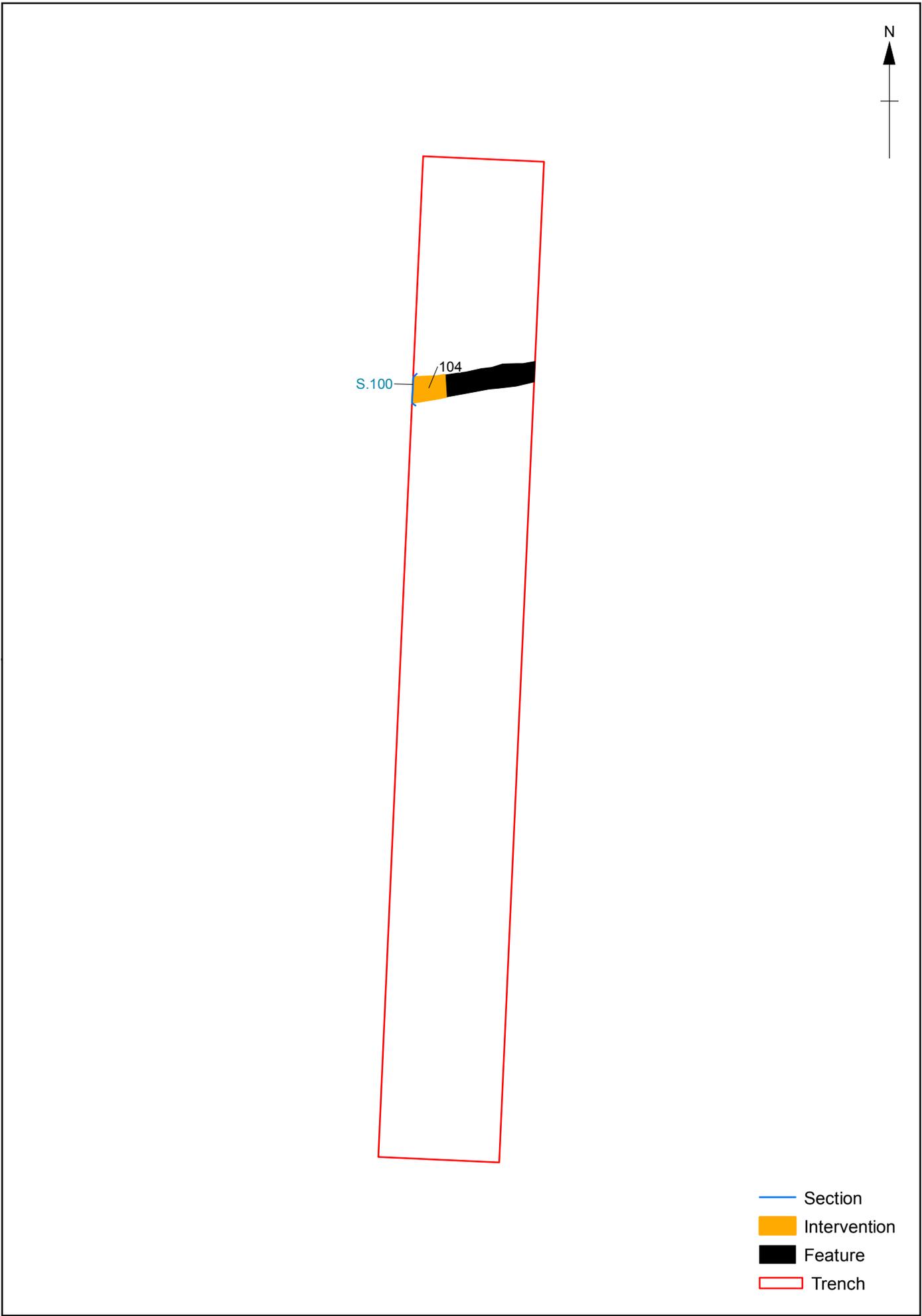
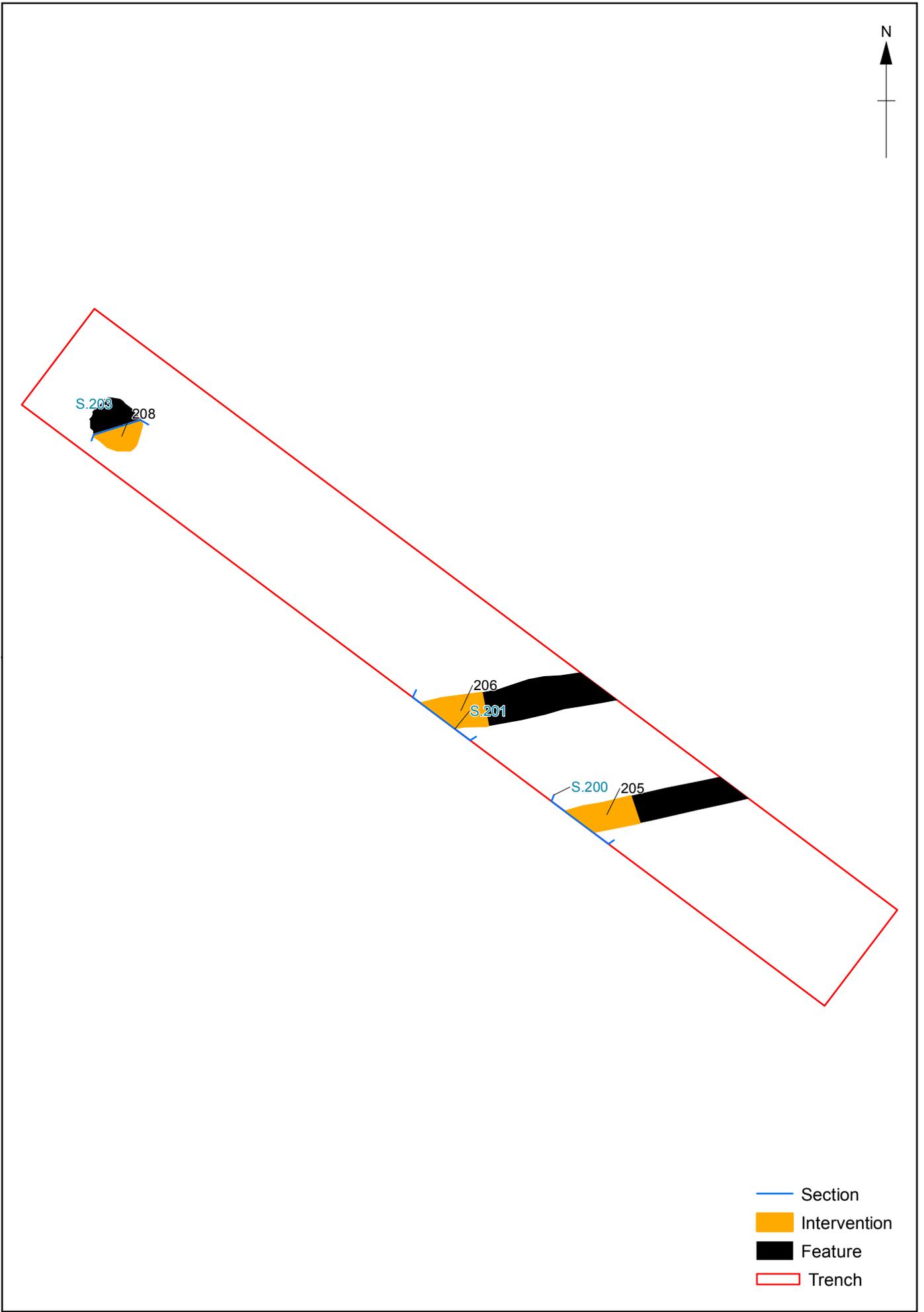


Figure 2: Trench locations



- Section
- Intervention
- Feature
- Trench

Figure 3: Trench 1



- Section
- Intervention
- Feature
- Trench

Figure 4: Trench 2

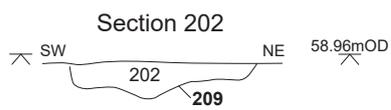
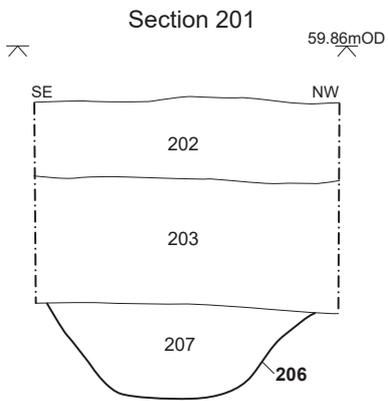
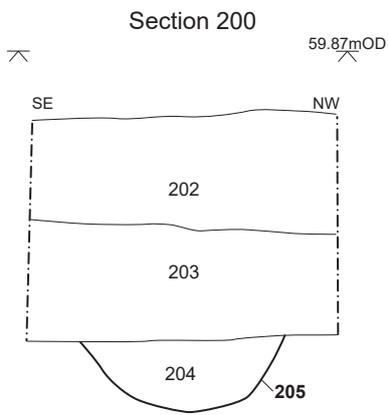
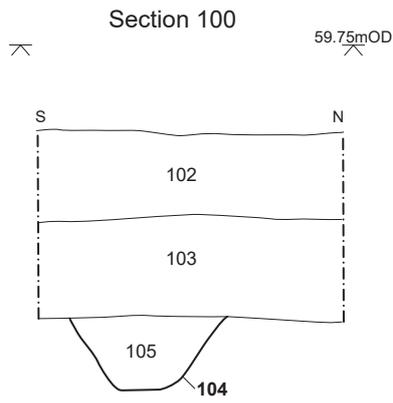


Figure 5: Sections



Plate 1: Gully 104, section 100 - view to NW



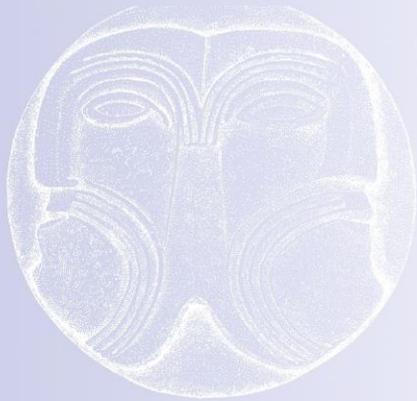
Plate 2: Gully 205, section 200 - view to west



Plate 3: Gully 206, section 201 - view to west



Plate 4: General shot of Trench 2 - view to NW



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